



Rhode Island Data Brief

Children at Risk (2011 RI Middle School Health Risks)

Middle school children (grades 6-8) face enormous changes affecting their lives. Rapid physical and mental growth combined with exposure to unhealthy behaviors and peer pressures make early adolescence particularly challenging. The purpose of this Brief is threefold: 1) to identify unfavorable risk factors among RI middle schoolers (Chart 1), 2) to see if those risks have improved or worsened over time (Chart 1), and 3) to see if there are any gender differences in risks (Chart 2). The findings are intended to inform interested parties and stimulate further research.

Twenty one measures¹ are examined, comprising seven areas of vulnerability (drugs & alcohol, injury, mental health, sex, tobacco, violence, and weight). Only those differences in values (over time or between girls and boys), that are statistically 'significant' at the 95% confidence level² are noted in the text. Lastly, all 21 measures are unfavorable indicators, so lower or declining values are preferred.

Drugs & Alcohol: One in ten students (10%) tried marijuana and one in ten (10%) abused prescription or 'over-the-counter' drugs. One in eight middle schoolers (13%) drinks alcohol.

Injury: Three in five students (59%) do not wear bike helmets, 6% do not wear seat belts when riding in cars, and one in five (22%) rode with a driver that had been drinking.

Mental Health: One in ten students (10%) has a long-term emotional disability, and one in six (16%) never gets support or help when needed. Six percent (6%) of kids have actually attempted suicide.

Sex: One in eight middle schoolers (12%) has had sexual intercourse, and boys were more likely than girls to have sex (17% vs. 8%). Four percent (4%) of kids became sexually active before age 11, with more boys than girls doing so (5% vs. 2%).

Tobacco: One in six students (17%) tried smoking and 4% are current smokers. Six percent (6%) of students currently use some kind of tobacco product (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, chewing or smokeless tobacco).

Violence: Two in five students (43%) physically fought, and fighting is more common among boys than girls (57% vs. 28%). Nearly one in two kids (45%) is bullied, and girls are more likely than boys to be bully victims (48% vs. 42%). Almost one in five students (18%) carries a weapon (e.g., gun, knife or club), and boys are more likely than girls to do so (27% vs. 9%).

Weight: Three percent (3%) of students report they are 'very overweight,' an improvement from the 4% that said so in 2007. One in ten students (10%) is not physically active, and 17% play on computers or watch TV more than five hours on an average school day.

The general lack of improvement in RI middle school students' risk behaviors is concerning, as are the unacceptably high levels of these risk factors. Recognition of these behaviors, and intervention efforts, are critical to help these children transition into healthy and productive adults.

Key Findings

One (of 21) measures improved in RI from 2007 to 2011 ('Very Overweight'). No measure worsened.

Girls did better than boys on four measures ('Had Intercourse,' 'Early Intercourse,' 'Physical Fighting' & 'Carried a Weapon'), and boys did better on one measure ('Bullied').

¹ Data are from RI's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, part of a biennial national survey of public middle (and high) school students on the major causes of disease and injury morbidity and mortality (contact Bruce Cryan, 401-222-5111, www.health.ri.gov/data/youthriskbehaviorsurvey/)

² As the RI-YRBS is a sample survey, if the 95% Confidence Intervals of two values do not overlap, one may conclude (with 95% certainty) that there was a 'real' difference between the two values (i.e., the difference was not likely due to sampling bias)

Chart 1: 2007 & 2011 RI Middle School Health Risks

* statistically significant changes

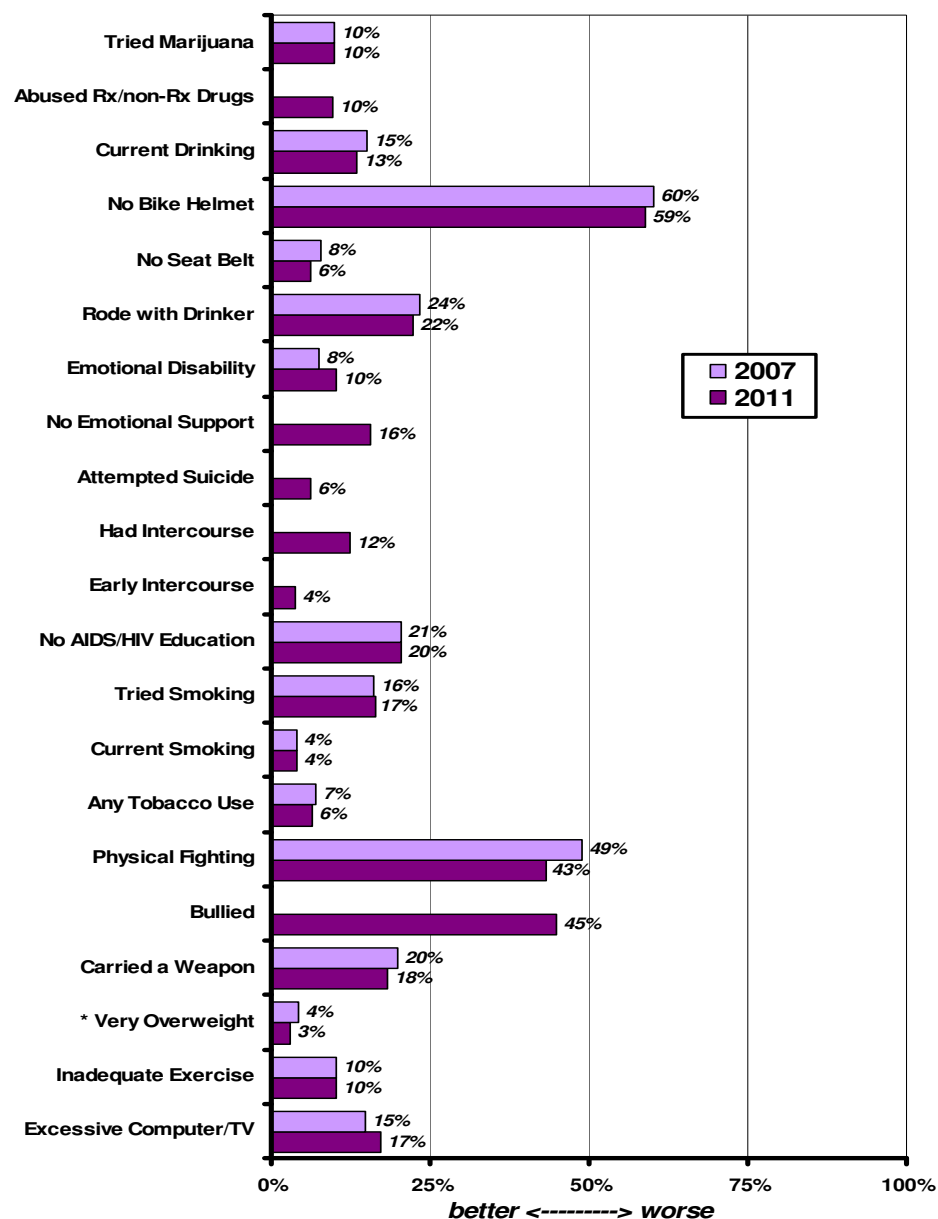
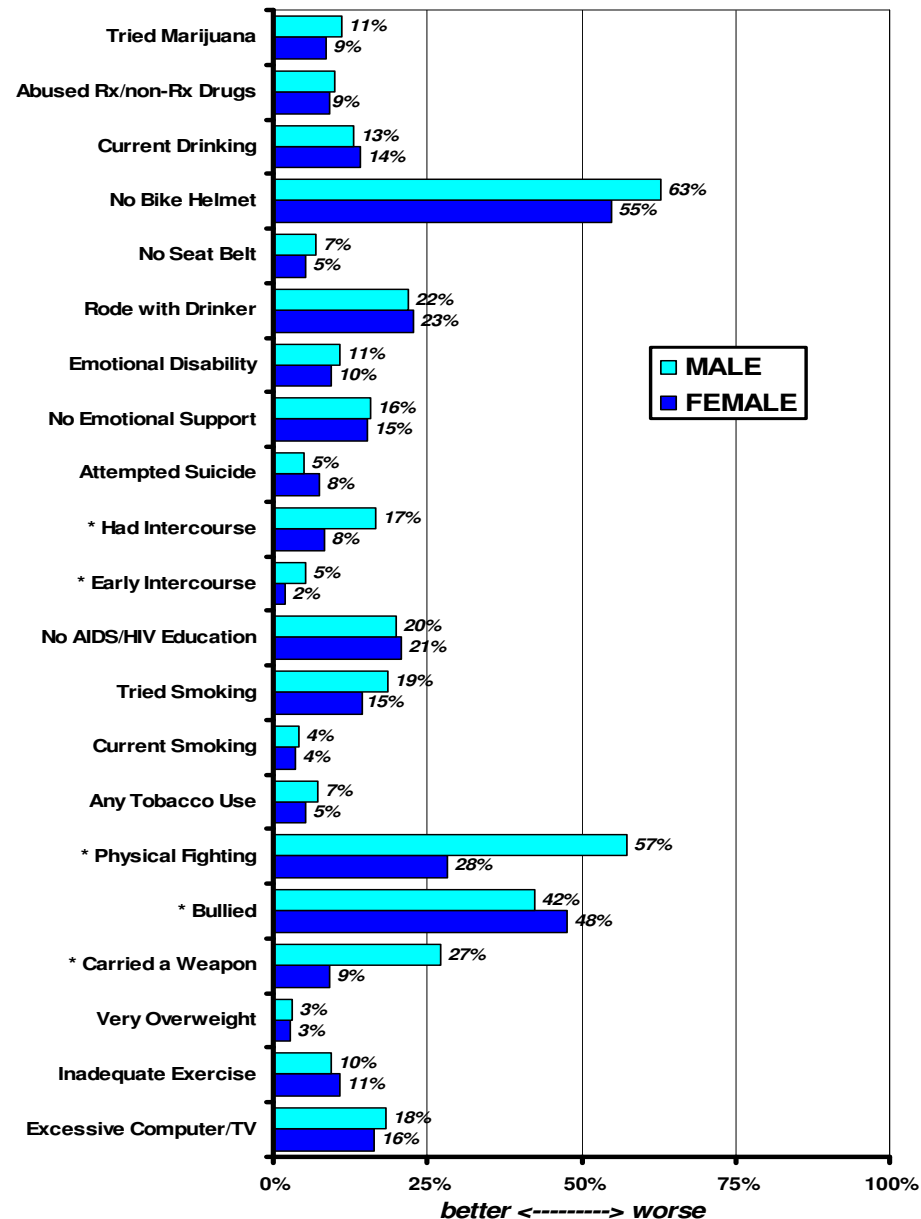


Chart 2: Male & Female RI 2011 Middle School Health Risks

* statistically significant differences



DRUGS & ALCOHOL MEASURES: *Tried Marijuana* (ever); *Abused Rx/non-Rx Drugs* (1+ times, ever); *Current Drinking* (acquired alcohol, past mo.); **INJURY MEASURES:** *No Bike Helmet* (never or rarely wore, past yr.); *No Seat Belt* (never or rarely wore, past yr.); *Rode with Drinker* (ever); **MENTAL HEALTH MEASURES:** *Emotional Disability* (for 6+ mos.); *No Emotional Support* (never get help when needed); *Attempted Suicide* (ever); **SEX MEASURES:** *Had Intercourse* (ever); *Early Intercourse* (had intercourse before age 11); *No AIDS/HIV Education* (never taught in school); **TOBACCO MEASURES:** *Tried Smoking* (ever); *Current Smoking* (smoked on 1+ days, past mo.); *Any Tobacco Use* (used chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or smoked cigars or cigarettes on 1+ days, past mo.); **VIOLENCE MEASURES:** *Physical Fighting* (ever); *Bullied* (at school, or cyber-bullied, ever); *Carried a Weapon* (carried a gun, knife or club, ever); **WEIGHT MEASURES:** *Very Overweight* (self-identify); *Inadequate Exercise* (60+ min. of exercise on 0 days, past wk.); *Excessive Computer/TV* (play on computer, or watch TV 5+ hrs., per school day)